

I Know There's Gonna Be by ipsilateral

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Summary:

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Author's Note:

Takes place right after Steve's last scene in Season 2.

Steve feels stupidly morose, just sitting there and craning his neck to catch stuttering glimpses of Nancy every time the gym doors open and shut. Real Jonathan Byers-y of him. Still, he keeps idling there until someone behind him honks.

"Alright, alright," Steve mutters. He readjusts his hands on the wheel and makes as if to shift into gear, but maybe he can catch one more second of Nancy if he --

The car honks again, longer this time, and Steve is totally robbed of his heartbreaking, this-is-what-The-Smiths-sing-about, if-you-truly-love-someone-set-them-free moment by some shitty Pinto dropping their brats off at a goddamn middle school dance.

When he gets home, it takes all of thirty seconds before he's opening the liquor cabinet and refilling the flask that's been getting a lot of use lately. The decision to wander around the woods behind the Harrington residence is one he makes with only slightly more caution. Like, they *had* just vanquished a hell demon spider virus; he figures this is probably the safest time to be out and about. It all sounds very logical in his head.

"The thing is," he says out loud, alone, savoring the sharp crunching of leaves underfoot. He raises his voice and yells, "The thing is!"

The thing is, Nancy was his first love, his first real best friend, his first everything important. Shit, she was the first person he'd bludgeoned an evil creature to death for almost exactly a year ago. And Jonathan happened to be there as well, sure, but whatever. Too bad that bear trap hadn't accidentally gotten caught on his foot. Would have been a nice little bright spot nestled in between the hours of complete pants-shitting terror.

In the end, Steve had fucked it up with Nancy, and probably would've fucked it up no matter what. And the cherry on top of this whole shit sundae is that he can't even put the hell portal stuff on his college applications. He's pretty pissed about that, since it showcases everything these schools are looking for: integrity, athleticism, teamwork, leadership. Even humility, and bowing out to people whose names rhyme with Schmonathan Schmyers.

His flask is down to the last few drops when he feels asphalt underfoot. The trees have turned into streetlights. He blinks dumbly and realizes that he's emerged on the other side of the woods only after he's almost run over by a bike.

"Steve!" the bike yells from about fifty feet away. It starts moving backward and Dustin eventually comes into view. "Jesus Christ, are you drunk? I thought you were a hobo."

"No," Steve scoffs. "No, I'm not drunk. What are you doing here anyway? Is the dance over already?"

"It's over for me. I completed my mission," Dustin says mysteriously. "Laid the foundation for the future, you know?" He wiggles his eyebrows.

Steve has no idea what Dustin's trying to insinuate. He just says, "Right. Cool. Totally," then staggers casually over to an old log and sits down.

"You're so blitzed," Dustin observes.

Kids are stupid. All of them. "I don't know why you sound so happy about it," Steve grumps.

"I thought drunk people were supposed to be happy? But you look pretty depressed, so, I mean. That's kind of weird, I guess." Dustin scratches his nose. "Wanna talk about it?"

Steve squints. "Talk about what."

"Why you're depressed. Duh."

"Well, fine, since you asked -- I'm *depressed* because drinking is not

driving my emotions. Emotions are driving my drinking." Steve gestures to his left and then his right. He repeats the motion a few times to drive the point home.

"Okay, number one: that makes no sense. And number two: c'mon. You're Steve with the Hair. Steve with the Car. King Steve!" Dustin does jazz hands by his ears and widens his eyes into an expression of awe. "Ahhh, King Steve, ahhh."

"Good hair and fast cars don't guarantee you anything, kid," Steve sighs. He sounds like he's a few seconds away from becoming a blubbering mess. Jesus, he really must be wasted.

The problem with Steve is that he's smarter than people give him credit for, but not smart enough to really turn it into anything productive. He sees his life in several flashes: college reject, bumming a job from his dad, stress ulcer, half-hearted marriage, two kids in a year and a half, stress ulcer. Then twenty years later, he'll be dropping his own brats off at the Snow Ball.

"We triumphed over a Mind Flayer, Steve. Do you know how big of a deal that is? No, of course you don't," Dustin answers himself. "But believe me, it's a huge deal. Girls will be swarming us soon. We'll speak at conventions. I'll probably be president one day. Now, come on, let's break up this pity party."

He pats the backseat of his bike. Steve looks up at him dubiously, this kid who's not even old enough to drive and whose shiny suit jacket is doubling as a safety reflector on the road; this kid who's beaming and happy and completely willing to give a dumb drunk senior a ride home. It breaks Steve's heart and makes him want to roll off the log and yell into the dirt.

Dustin pats the seat again. "Come on, it's freezing."

Fuck it. Steve tucks the flask into his jacket and manages to get onto the seat with minimal flailing. Dustin, clearly not used to handling the extra weight, takes off at a wobble resembling amateur tightrope walkers. They fall over three times and probably take twice as long to get home than if Steve had just walked himself, but they make it.